

SPATHODEA IN HAWAII

Otto & Isa Degener

It may seem strange for residents of the Hawaiian Islands to burst into print regarding taxa of the African genus Spathodea of the Bignoniaceae. Nevertheless, as three are grown here, we wish to dispel some local confusion regarding them.

The glabrous taxon with scarlet flowers having a silky tomentulose calyx with elevated nerves is widely planted as a street tree. This we consider to be Spathodea campanulata Beauv. According to Welwitsch in Iter Angolense, in Journ. Bot. London 3:332. 1865, it occurs naturally in Golungo Alto and Cazengo.

The taxon with leaves densely tawny puberulent beneath and with scarlet flowers having a silky tomentulose calyx with impressed nerves was flourishing about the Botany Building on the University of Hawaii campus between 1922 and 1927. This is mentioned in Degener, O., Flora Haw. Fam. 321. 12/24/34. It still occurs, but rarely, in some gardens in the State. In spite of some leading botanists considering it synonymous with the above species, we consider this to be typical Spathodea nilotica Seem. According to page 333 of the Iter, this "Bushy scarlet-flowered tree" came from "Ungoro Glav., Aug. 1860. Speke and Grant's Expedition to the Sources of the Nile."

Recently a third taxon appeared in the Islands which botanically is of modest interest, but horticulturally is causing a furor. We here name it:

Spathodea nilotica forma bryanii Deg. & Deg., f. nov.
A specie corolla flava differt. Degeners' 33, 441. Seed introduced from Africa by L. F. Bryan. Specimen from cultivated tree in Kona, Hawaii. Collected by Lester F. Bryan, Dec. 1972.
Type: at U.S. Nat. Arb.; cotype, N.Y.

As Welsley & Dayton (Standardized Plant Names, Ed. 2. 1962.) chose "flambeautree" for members of Spathodea, we here name this new taxon "Bryans flambeautree" with the vain hope of discouraging its local name of "Bryans Kona gold" from becoming popular. "Kona" applies to a Hawaiian district hardly associated with the taxon, and "gold" might apply to any kind of yellow-flowered plant whatsoever. The corolla, style and filaments, instead of being red, are "pumpkin-yellow."

According to retired forester Bryan (letter dated March 8, 1974.), "My seed came from Peter Greensmith of Nairobi, Kenya, Africa thru David Barry, Jr. who operates the California Jungle Nursery in Los Angeles." The name "Bryans Kona Gold" was printed Oct. 12, 1973 in the "West Hawaii Today" newspaper; and Oct. 14 with text and colored plate in the magazine section of the "Hawaii Tribune-Herald" by County Agent Norman Bezona. We had never realized the complicated history of this

or of a similar form until we communicated with Dr. Frederick G. Meyer of the U.S. National Arboretum, who sent us a copy of the American Horticulturist, Vol. 52, Spring 1974. There Dr. Edwin A. Menninger writes about "The Yellow African Tulip Tree" in some detail. That our form is strictly a cultigen is questionable. According to Eggeeling & Dale (Indigenous Trees of Uganda, Ed. 2, 42, 1952.) "A form with rich buttercup yellow flowers, well worth perpetuating, occurs in Bugishu and a somewhat similar tree has been found in Mengo."

BISHOP'S "INVENTORY"

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After eighteen months of research Dr. Luther Earl Bishop authored "Honolulu Botanic Gardens Inventory 1972," a 294 page book measuring eight by eight inches. It was published by the Friends of Foster Gardens Press in 1973. Its thick eggshell brown, Manila cover attractively binds about thirty pages to include a "Forward" and an introduction to seven botanic gardens located on the Island of Oahu. The oldest and most interesting historically is Foster Botanic Garden located in downtown Honolulu.

Foster Botanic Garden, also known as Foster Park, had been the home of the German William Hillebrand, physician to Hawaiian royalty and author of the prized "Flora of the Hawaiian Islands," published posthumously in 1888. During his twenty years' residence in Honolulu, Hillebrand (b. 1821 - d. 1936) cultivated choice Hawaiian and exotic plants in the garden about his home in Nuuanu Valley. In 1880 the Canadian Thomas R. Foster purchased the property. He married Mary Elizabeth Robinson (1844-1930), also known by her Hawaiian name Mikahala, the daughter of James Robinson and a Hawaiian chiefess. A convert to Buddhism, the aging widow had seen the ghost of Captain Foster riding his favorite horse, nights, among the towering trees in her garden. This dream may have helped the tactful and understanding botanist Harold L. Lyon (1879-1957) to prevail upon Mrs. Foster to deed this property to the City and County of Honolulu as a "public and tropical park to be known as Foster Park." Thus the Board of Public Parks and Recreation assumed responsibility for the five and a half acres in 1931. Botanist Lyon became Director of the Garden until his death, whereupon Landscape Architect Paul R. Weissich took over the position. By 1972 the Honolulu Botanic Garden System, under the latter's able guidance, had grown to seven botanic gardens comprising 266 acres!

The "Inventory" proper lists the plants by binomials, fortunately with authorities; the accession number, giving the